

# **THE WOODY GUTHRIE MATERIALS IN THE ARCHIVE OF FOLK CULTURE**

**Prepared by Joanne Rasi**



**American Folklife Center, Library of Congress**

**Washington, D.C.**

**2002**

**Encoded by Judy Ng, [December 2004]**

## Collection Summary

**Title:** The Woody Guthrie Materials in the Archive of Folk Culture

**Span Dates:** [1935-1951]

**Contents:** 3 boxes; 6.5 linear feet; 127 items in collection; manuscripts comprising of lyrics, correspondence, and essays; 29 sound recordings, 1 artifact

**Repository:** Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Summary:** The Woody Guthrie Materials in the American Folklife Center consist of manuscripts and sound recordings. The manuscripts include correspondence, essays, doodles, song lyrics, and sound recordings by singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie. Most of these materials date to the early 1940s, when Guthrie was in correspondence with several Library of Congress staff, primarily folklorist Alan Lomax. Included in these predominantly unpublished materials are letters between Guthrie and Lomax, letters from Library of Congress staff sent to or concerning Guthrie, and lyrics and essays that Guthrie sent to Lomax. The sound recordings include interviews, monologs, musical performances, and radio appearances, nearly all of which were hosted or arranged by Alan Lomax. Many of the documents and recordings portray Guthrie's opinions of the political and social conflicts of the time. The majority of the songs, represented here in manuscript or audio, are ballads with topical or protest content, frequently consisting of new lyrics written to old familiar tunes.

**Languages:** Collection material in English

## Collection Concordance by Format

Quantity	Physical Description/Version	Location/I.D. Numbers
<b>Manuscript Materials</b>		
15	folders	Box 1 (Folders 1-A through 8; Folders A-F); Box 3 (Oversized Materials)
1	bound copy of song lyrics, 212 pages	Box 2 (Item I)
1	photocopy of published songbook, 30 pages	Box 2 (Item II)
<b>Sound Recordings</b>		
1	7-inch reel, 10 minutes	AFC1995/004 and dub numbers 14 A5- 14 A9
4	10-inch discs, 12 minutes	AFS 6100-6103 and LWO 3493 reels 40B and 41A
1	12-inch disc, 6 minutes	AFS 6105 and LWO 3493 reels 40B and 41A
17	12-inch discs, 267 minutes	AFS 3407-3423 and LWO 4872, reels 225-227
1	16-inch discs, 28 minutes	AFS 4491 and LWO 4872 reel 311A
1	16-inch disc, 5 minutes	AFC 1939/002, AFS 4507 and LWO 5111 reel 442
1	16-inch disc, 13 minutes	AFC 1939/002, AFS 4508 and LWO 4872 reel 314
1	16-inch disc, 12 minutes	AFC 1939/002, AFS 4510 and LWO 4872 reel 315
1	16-inch disc, 3 minutes	AFC 1939/002, AFS 13,498-99, LWO 5111 reel 428A
1	cassette, 24 minutes	AFC 1991/003 (formerly RYB 0667)
<b>Artifacts</b>		
1	stone from the foundation of Guthrie's childhood home	Box 3

# Administrative Information

## Provenance

Singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie wrote between twenty-five hundred and three thousand songs, most of which took the form of familiar tunes updated with politicized lyrics about contemporary situations. Pioneer folksong collector Alan Lomax, the assistant in charge of the Archive of American Folk-Song at the Library of Congress, first heard Guthrie in March of 1940. Lomax immediately made arrangements for Guthrie to travel to Washington, D.C. to record an oral autobiography that would include traditional and original songs. The archival materials in the American Folklife Center include this recorded autobiography, other sound recordings Guthrie made for the Library, a number of his New York City radio performances, and other miscellaneous recordings. The Woody Guthrie Materials also include manuscripts, primarily of Guthrie's correspondence with Lomax and others at the Archive of American Folk-Song, as well as writings and songbooks he supplied to the Archive. Most of the written materials were created and sent to Lomax during the three-year period in which they frequently corresponded, from 1940 to 1942. The majority of the materials, mostly Guthrie's direct output dating from 1935 to 1951, entered the Library's collections between 1940 and 1950. Additional materials, either by Guthrie or about him, have continued to be collected up to the present.

## Processing History

In 1987, Archivist Marsha Maguire and Archive head Joseph C. Hickerson processed and summarized the materials, based in part on an earlier list compiled by researcher Richard A. Reuss. In 2001, Rachel I. Howard prepared the Finding Aid and arranged for selected materials to be available on line as part of the American Memory project. In 2002, Joanne Rasi created the Woody Guthrie Materials Guide based in part on the Finding Aid.

## Location

[Location of materials]

## Access

Listening and viewing access to the materials is unrestricted. Listening copies of most of the recordings are available in the Folklife Reading Room.

## Restrictions

Restrictions apply concerning the use, duplication, or publication of items. Consult a reference librarian in the Folklife Reading Room for specific information about these materials.

## Electronic Format

Selected letters and manuscript materials are available on-line through the American Folklife Center Web site: Woody Guthrie and the Archive of American Folk Song at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwghhtml/wwghome.html>; song lyrics and sound recordings are not available in electronic format.

## Publications

[Describe publications that were published after using collection materials]

## Related Materials

[Related materials]

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: The Woody Guthrie Materials in the Archive of Folk Culture, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

# The Collecting Institution

The Archive of Folk-Song was founded in 1928 to collect and preserve American folksongs at the Library of Congress. During the years when the majority of the Guthrie materials were acquired, 1940 to 1950, the Archive was directed by the following heads: John Lomax (1932-42), Alan Lomax (Assistant in Charge, 1937-42), Benjamin Botkin (1942-45), and Duncan Emrich (1945-56). During these years, the name of the Archive changed from The Archive of American Folk-Song (1928-46) to the Folklore Section (1946-54) to the Archive of Folk-Song (1954-81) to the Archive of Folk Culture (1981- ). The Archive is now part of the American Folklife Center.

The most significant collector of Guthrie materials was Alan Lomax. The bulk of the Guthrie materials were acquired by the Library between 1940, when Lomax met Guthrie, and 1942 when Lomax left the Archive. During those years, Lomax and Guthrie were in correspondence fairly regularly. In addition to exchanging letters, Lomax also encouraged Guthrie to write essays and to send collections of lyrics to the Library for preservation. Within the first year of their correspondence, Lomax also invited Guthrie for several recording sessions during which Guthrie shares autobiographical information and performs songs. Also during this year, Lomax received and archived recordings of his own national radio broadcasts, several of which include performances by Guthrie.

Guthrie materials continued to be collected, though in a more sporadic fashion, after Lomax left; Guthrie continued to correspond with Library of Congress staff until 1950. Additional recordings and manuscripts came to the Archive through various sources and by various means: as parts of other collections, as pieces sent in to the American Folklife Center, or as ephemera collected by staff. In 2002, a Guthrie-signed permission letter located in the Motion Picture, Broadcast and Recorded Sound Division was sent to the AFC to be housed with the Guthrie Materials in the Archive of Folk Culture.

## Key Subjects

Note: Subject terms and names are listed as they appear in the Library of Congress catalog. An asterisk (\*) marks variants, nicknames, and other forms of names, as well as alternate subject terms.

### Corporate Subjects

Archive of American Folk Song  
British Broadcasting Corporation  
Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc.  
Elektra Records (Firm)  
National Broadcasting Company, Inc.  
RCA Manufacturing Company, Inc. [Also known as: RCA Victor]  
Radio Corporation of America. RCA Victor Division. [Also known as: RCA Victor]  
United States. Office of War Information

### Genres

Ballads, English-United States  
Ballads, American  
Blues (Music)  
Folk music-United States  
Folk songs, English-United States  
Political ballads and songs, American  
Popular music-United States--1931-1940  
Popular music-United States--1941-1950  
Protest songs-United States  
Topical songs-United States

### Topics

Cowboys-Songs and music  
Community music-United States  
Composers-United States  
Depressions-1929-United States-Songs and music

Dust storms-Oklahoma  
 Folk singers-United States-Biography  
 Migration, Internal-United States  
 Music-Wit and humor  
 Musicians-Correspondence, reminiscences, etc.  
 Radio broadcasting--1940-1950  
 Radio in propaganda  
 Radio plays-United States  
 Songbooks-United States  
 Songs with guitar  
 Songs with harmonica  
 Working class-United States-Songs and music  
 World War, 1939-1945--Drama  
 World War, 1939-1945--United States-Songs and music

### **Locations**

California  
 New York (City)  
 New York (State)  
 Oklahoma  
 Texas  
 Washington (D.C.)

### **Names**

Almanac Singers  
 Black, Ivan\*  
 Cunningham, Sis, 1909- [Also known as: Cunningham, Agnes]  
 De Caux, Len\*  
 Emrich, Duncan, 1908- [died 1979]  
 Fadiman, Clifton, 1904- [died 1999]  
 Floyd, Pretty Boy 1904-1934 [Also known as: Floyd, Charles A. (Charles Arthur); Mitchell, Frank, 1904-1934; or Pretty Boy Smith]  
 Fritch, Gunther\*  
 Garland, Jim  
 Geer, Will [Also known as: Ghery, William]  
 Golden Gate Quartet  
 Groppers, Bill\*  
 Gunning, Sarah Ogan, 1910-1983  
 Guthrie, Marjorie  
 Harris, Roy, 1898- [died 1979]  
 Hawes, Bess Lomax, 1921-  
 Hays, Lee, 1914-1981  
 Houston, Cisco [1918-1961]  
 Ives, Burl, 1909- [died 1995]  
 Leadbelly, 1885-1949 [also known as: Lead Belly or Ledbetter, Huddie]  
 Lefty Lou [also known as: Dempsey, Maxine Crissman; Crissman, Maxine; or Crissman, Lefty Lou]  
 Lomax, Alan, 1915- [died 2002]  
 Lyttleton, Elizabeth, writer  
 McBride, Mary Margaret, 1899- [died 1976]  
 McGhee, Brownie, 1915- [died 1996] [Also known as: McGhee, Walter Brown]  
 MacLeish, Archibald, 1892- [died 1982]  
 Manners, Zeke [Also known as: Mannes, Leo]  
 Ray, Nicholas, 1911- [died 1979] [Also known as: Kienzle, Raymond Nicholas]  
 Robinson, Earl, 1910- [died 1991]  
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962

Seeger, Pete, 1919- [Also known as Bowers, Pete]  
Spivacke, Harold, 1904-1977  
Steinbeck, John, 1902-1968  
Terry, Sonny [1911-1986] [Also known as: Terry, Blind Sonny; Terrell, Saunders; or Terrell, Sanders]  
White, Josh [Also known as: White, Joshua (Joshua Daniel); Singing Christian; or Pinewood Tom]

## Scope and Content Note

Woody Guthrie was a prolific artist known for his achievements as a singer-songwriter and as an author of fiction. Guthrie toured and performed for a period of approximately twenty-five years, exhibiting a life-long dedication to social activism by playing his politically charged music for audiences around the nation. His prodigious output included nearly three thousand songs, several novels, and countless other writings in the form of articles, essays, poems, and letters. In addition, Guthrie also painted, drew cartoons, and often illustrated his writings.

From 1940 to 1950, Guthrie corresponded with staff at the Library of Congress. The most significant and frequent correspondence occurred between 1940 and 1942, when Guthrie wrote regularly to the Assistant in Charge of the Archive of Folk Culture, Alan Lomax. Their correspondence explores political issues, current events, career and recording issues, and includes personal exchanges. In addition, Guthrie sent Lomax prose pieces and other creative writings, some of which are reminiscent of journal or diary entries in their stream-of-consciousness nature. Some pieces are written on paper bags and tissue paper, some include doodles or sketches. In addition, Guthrie sent lyrics of his songs, in several formats, including one large hand-bound set, smaller unbound sets, and single pages enclosed in letters. Most of these songs are ballads that used familiar melodies but employed words to address contemporary situations. Some of the manuscripts were written prior to 1940 and were subsequently sent to Lomax during their correspondence. In some cases Guthrie reworked or annotated old manuscripts before sending them. Of the 390 pages of writing, 305 pages are lyrics, 20 pages are prose pieces, and 65 pages are correspondence.

Also between 1940 and 1942, Alan Lomax arranged for Guthrie to visit the Library in order to make recordings of his autobiography and some of his songs. These recordings, as well as recordings of some of Guthrie's radio performances and three other recordings (an audition of the Almanac Singers, a series of songs recorded by Mike Seeger, and Guthrie's last-known recorded concert), constitute the recorded sound portion of these archival materials, totaling six hours, twenty minutes of materials pertaining directly to Guthrie.

**Strengths of the Archival Materials:** These items present a particular window into the brief period of Guthrie's life during which he was closely affiliated with the Library of Congress. Since the materials have been housed in the Archive from the date they were received, many of them are in excellent condition. Lomax perceived that Guthrie was a significant figure in folk music; this recognition encouraged Lomax not only to collect existing materials, but also to persuade Guthrie to create documents and recordings that would showcase Guthrie's ideas, opinions, and style.

**Weaknesses of the Archival Materials:** Because the materials represent a small segment of Guthrie's life and work, they should not be understood as representative, but rather should be analyzed and interpreted in conjunction with Guthrie materials held elsewhere (see "Related Materials and Collections").

# Description of Series

## Container

## Series

### Series I: Manuscript Materials

Composed of 6 ½ linear inches of correspondence, essays, prose, doodles, and song lyrics written by Woody Guthrie between 1935 and 1951. Note: Many of these materials have been scanned for preservation, and portions are available in electronic format, as Woody Guthrie and the Archive of American Folk Song: Correspondence, 1940-1950, at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwghtml>.

### Administrative Files

### Lyrics

### Unpublished Writings

### Correspondence

### Series II: Sound Recordings

Composed of 7 hours, 13 minutes of sound recordings, with 6 hours, 20 minutes featuring Woody Guthrie, 1940-51.

### Autobiography of Woodrow (Woody) Wilson Guthrie

AFS 3407-3423. Preservation copy LWO 4872, reels 225-227; recorded March 21, 22 and 27, 1940, at Radio Broadcasting Division of the Department of Interior, Washington, DC. Seventeen 12-inch discs: 4 hours, 27 minutes duration, 4 hours, 27 minutes of Guthrie. Autobiography as told by Woody Guthrie, including songs and stories, Alan Lomax interviewer.

### American School of the Air, "Folk Music of America" radiobroadcasts

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4507. Preservation copy LWO 5111 reel 442; aired April 2, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 14 minutes duration, 5 minutes of Guthrie. Part I of the 22nd American School of the Air "Folk Music of America" series segment: "Poor Farmer Songs." Features Alan Lomax, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Woody Guthrie. Disc is part of the Alan Lomax/CBS Radio Series Collection.

### American School of the Air, "Folk Music of America" radiobroadcasts

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4508. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 314; aired April 2, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 15 minutes duration, 13 minutes of Guthrie. Part II of the 22nd American School of the Air "Folk Music of America" series segment: "Poor Farmer Songs." Features Alan Lomax, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Woody Guthrie. Disc is part of the Alan Lomax/CBS Radio Series Collection.

### American School of the Air, "Folk Music of America" radiobroadcasts

AFC 1939/002, AFS 13,498-99. Preservation copy LWO 5111 reel 428A; aired April 23, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 27 minutes duration, 3 minutes of Guthrie. The final broadcast of "Folk Music in America" for the 1939-40 season, featuring Alan Lomax with the Golden Gate Quartet, Woody Guthrie, and Leadbelly. Disc is part of the Alan Lomax/CBS Radio Series Collection.

### Back Where I Come From, Pilot Episode, Weather

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4510. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 315; aired August 19, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 30 minutes duration, 12 minutes of Guthrie. The pilot broadcast of "Back Where I Come From," on the topic of "Weather," featuring Clifton (Kip) Fadiman, host; Len Doyle, "The Expert"; the Golden Gate Quartet, Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Willie Johnson, and Josh White. Disc is part of the Alan Lomax/CBS Radio Series Collection.

### Woody Guthrie Songs in the Mike Seeger Collection

AFC1995/004 and dub numbers 14A5- 14A9; recorded circa 1940 in New York. One 7-inch reel: 10 minutes duration, 10 minutes of Guthrie. Woody Guthrie performs with Pete Seeger.

### Woody Guthrie recorded at Library of Congress Recording Lab

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4491. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 311A; recorded January 4, 1941, at Recording Lab at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. One 16-inch disc: 28 minutes duration, 28 minutes of Guthrie. Seven songs performed by Woody Guthrie; each song includes spoken introduction. Disc is part of the Alan Lomax/CBS Radio Series Collection.

### Almanac Singers audition for Wm. Morris & Co.

AFS 6100-6105. Preservation copy LWO 3493 reels 40B and 41A; recorded January 1942 in New York. Two 10-inch, four 12-inch discs: 18 minutes duration, 18 minutes of Guthrie. The Almanac Singers audition for William Morris Agency with Alan Lomax, John A. Lomax, and Earl Robinson.

### Woody Guthrie Concert and Conversation

AFC 1991/003; recorded April 14, 1951, at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. Cassette copy of a wire spool recording: 24 minutes duration, 24 minutes of Guthrie. Guthrie performs in concert at St. John's College. There are very few existing recordings of Guthrie concerts; this recording is the last-known recorded performance. Cassette originally numbered RYB 0667; transfer of ownership from MBRS to AFC has eliminated the use of this number.

### Series III: Artifacts

Letter from Ellis Paul attached to stone from the foundation of Guthrie's home in Okemah, Oklahoma. August 1998

### Series IV: Vertical Files and Ephemera: Corporate Subject Files

An ever-growing collection of ephemeral material regarding Woody Guthrie, including articles, bibliographies, discographies, inventories, liner notes, programs, and promotional material from record companies. Dimensions of vertical files increase with each addition; currently there are 8 ½ linear inches of ephemeral material regarding Woody Guthrie, 1940 to the present. An additional ¾ inch pertains to the Guthrie family. Materials are located in the Folklife Reading Room.



# Collection Inventory

## *Container*

## *Contents*

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### **Series I: Manuscript Materials**

Composed of 6 ½ linear inches of correspondence, essays, prose, doodles, and song lyrics written by Woody Guthrie between 1935 and 1951. Note: Many of these materials have been scanned for preservation, and portions are available in electronic format, as Woody Guthrie and the Archive of American Folk Song: Correspondence, 1940-1950, at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wwgh.html>.

### **Administrative Files**

BOX 1	Archival Materials Guide
FOLDER 1-A	
BOX 1	Inventories and Case File
FOLDER 1-B	

### **Lyrics**

BOX 1	Lyrics: "Alonzo M. Zilch's Own Collection of Original Songs and Ballads," 1935
FOLDER 1	
BOX 1	Lyrics: "Farther Along," March 1941
FOLDER 2	
BOX 1	Lyrics: "The Final Call," April 1941
FOLDER 3	
BOX 1	Lyrics: "Ten of Woody Guthrie's Songs: Book One," April 1945
FOLDER 4	
BOX 1	Lyrics: Wartime Songs, 1940-42 and undated
FOLDER 5	
BOX 2	Lyrics: Songs of Woody Guthrie, undated
ITEM I	
BOX 2	Lyrics: Old Time Hill Country Songs, undated
FOLDER II	

### **Unpublished Writings**

BOX 1	Writings: "No Title," Undated
FOLDER 6	
BOX 1	Writings: "The Railroad Cricket," 1941
FOLDER 7	
BOX 1	Writings: Undated Essay on 8" x 12" Envelope, circa Fall 1940
FOLDER 8	
BOX 3	Writings: Three Essays written between September and November 1940

### **Correspondence**

BOX 1	Correspondence: Letters (mostly to Alan Lomax, Duncan Emrich), 1940-50 and undated
FOLDER A	

## Series I: Manuscript Materials

### *Container*

### *Contents*

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BOX 1	Correspondence: Letters of Permission, 1942-48
FOLDER B	
BOX 1	Correspondence: Post Cards, 1941
FOLDER C	
BOX 1	Correspondence: Letters to Record Companies, 1940, and circa June 1942
FOLDER D	
BOX 1	Correspondence: Library of Congress correspondence to Guthrie, 1940-50 and undated
FOLDER E	
BOX 1	Correspondence: Library of Congress correspondence concerning Guthrie, 1940-42 and undated
FOLDER F	

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AFC 1939/002, AFS 4510. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 315; aired August 19, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 30 minutes duration, 12 minutes of Guthrie. The pilot broadcast of "Back Where I Come From," on the topic of "Weather," featuring Clifton (Kip) Fadiman, host; Len Doyle, "The Expert"; the Golden Gate Quartet, Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Willie Johnson, and Josh White. Disc is part of the Alan Lomax/CBS Radio Series Collection.

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